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ABSTRACT

Narratives about personal experiences were elicited from 33 kindergarten children in a suburb of Zurich. The narratives were analyzed for the development of the use of the particle "ebe" from a conversational context (where the use of the particle was already mastered) to an appropriate narrative context (in which the particle, as appropriately used, was new to the children). In the former context, "ebe" is an unstressed modal particle directing the listener's attention to shared and silently acknowledged background information. In the narrative context, "ebe" is stressed and refers to information that has been made explicit in the discourse at hand. The subjects were aware of the oddity of the modal "ebe" in narrative, and tried to repair their statements, apparently becoming aware of the requirements of the narrative register through these "errors." About half the subjects were capable of producing the well-formed narrative that is a prerequisite for the introduction of stressed "ebe," but even these children, with three exceptions, did not use stressed "ebe" successfully. (JB)

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THE EVALUATIVE FUNCTION OF THE PARTICLE 'EBE' IN SWISS-GERMAN CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES

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Introduction

Labov (1972 : 366) defines "evaluation of the narrative" as "the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative ..." and later he points out, "the evaluation of the narrative forms a secondary structure which ... may be found in various forms throughout the narrative."

This paper deals with the evaluative function of a lexical item, namely the Swiss-German particle ebe. I'm going to discuss how six-year-old children transfer different uses of this particle from a conversational to a narrative context, and how they finally acquire the appropriate use in narratives.

The German particle eben--Swiss-German ebe--is used in different grammatical functions (cf. Asbach-Schnitker, 1975), but its use and meaning may vary considerably from one German dialect to another.

As an ADJECTIVE eben/ebe means 'flat'; historically it is identical with English even, as e.g. in "even with the ground."

As a TEMP. ADVERB eben corresponds to English just. However, Swiss-German ebe is not used as a TEMP. ADVERB, in this function grad (German gerade) is used exclusively.

As a 'referential' ADVERB (Asbach-Schnitker, 1975 : 308) eben/ebe is used to emphasize the constituent expressing the sentence topic (old information), conveying an implicit sentence meaning "this is obvious/evident in the given circumstances or context," e.g.

(1) ebén dás wollte ich auch sagen
(that is just/exactly what I was going to say)

In this emphasizing function eben/ebe always carries stress, and in conversation it mostly occurs in the front position of the first utterance of a turn implicitly commenting on the preceding statement of the interlocutor.

Another function of eben/ebe is that of a MODAL PARTICLE (MP). The term MP is used in recent German linguistics to label a class of function words which function essentially as modifiers of the illocutionary force of a speech act (cf. Weydt, 1979; Bublitz, 1976; Franck, 1979). The term 'Abtönungspartikel,' meaning shading or toning paricle, is also used, e.g. by Weydt (1969). MPs signal how a communicative act has to be interpreted by expressing among other things the speaker's attitude towards his utterance, his interpretation and evaluation of the relation between himself, the hearer and the speech situation.

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The MP eben/ebe, like all MPs, is always unstressed, it follows syntactically the finite verb. Its meaning is essentially the same as that of its emphasizing, stressed homophone: it expresses the speaker's view of a situation or event as being definitely given and therefore obvious in the given circumstances.

Although there are similarities in meaning between the MP eben/ebe and its emphasizing homophone, their functions in discourse are different. The MP eben/ebe directs the listener's attention to a specific part of the shared and tacitly acknowledged facts underlying the speech situation. With an implicit sentence signalled by the MP, the speaker highlights shared background knowledge, which he believes the listener did not or will not take into account the way the speaker intends to do it. The emphasizing particle ében/ébe, however, always puts in focus a part of previous discourse which already has been in foreground.

Thus, the difference between the two uses of the particle eben/ebe can be best explained in a 'posed' - 'presupposed' paradigm: stressed ében/ébe directs the listener's attention to facts posed in previous discourse, whereas the MP refers to presupposed facts.

From this discussion of the uses of eben/ebe in conversational discourse it is evident that only the emphasizing ébe can function appropriately in narrative discourse, at least in more formal situations where all context of the narrative must be built up, i.e. posed, before it can be referred to. Narrative ébe always occurs before a phrase summarizing the abandoned main episode sometimes including parts of the background information given in the inserted text. By emphasizing the repeated piece of old information it signals to the audience the restoring of foreground, and at the same time it ties the utterance in which it occurs back to previous parts of the text, thus establishing text cohesion.[1]

In conversation both the MP ebe as well as its emphasizing homophone are used appropriately by children at age six. The appropriate use of ébe in narratives however causes problems to most children at this age. Before turning to this topic, let me add a few words about the data used in this study.

The data

A corpus of speech was collected in four kindergartens in a suburb of Zurich. The corpus covers increasingly restricted speech situations from spontaneous conversations among children to elicited 'speech performances' required by the teacher or the researcher. The aim of the project for which the data were collected (cf. Stern, 1978) is a formal and functional description of children's speech, and a description of their discourse capabilities in different--informal and formal--speech situations before they are influenced by formal language instruction at school.

The sample consists of 33 children, 16 girls and 17 boys, the average age being six years for the first recording series, nine months more for the second series of recordings.

The present analysis is based on 53 narratives about personal experiences during the past weekend or, for the second recording series, during the winter sports vacation. They were produced in formal settings, familiar to the children, which took place every Monday morning in all four kindergartens.

Because of its anaphoric and cohesive function, narrative ebe occurs only in those narratives of the sample which are structurally well developed, i.e. in those that, apart from the basic temporal sequence of events, contain descriptive elements providing spatial and durational context, as well as evaluative devices (cf. Polanyi, 1976: 61). Following Labov (1972) I call these narratives 'well formed.'

In our sample the production of well-formed narratives mostly depended on the interactive style of the kindergarten teacher in the narrative settings. Directive and interceptive handling of the situation by the teacher did not favor the development of the kind of narrative skills necessary for the production of a well-formed narrative.

Table 1 compares the number of well-formed narratives to the total number of narratives produced in each kindergarten:

Table 1: Number of well formed narratives

	record. ser.I	contain ebe	record. ser.II	contain ebe
kiga 1	9/9	2	8/9	4
2	4/6	1	6/6	1
3	1/8	3	-	-
4	0/7	0	1/8	1

Comment: num. of well formed narratives / num. of narratives

The vertical order follows my intuition about the increasingly directive style of the teachers. Although the four kindergartens are similar regarding the population, there are striking differences between the first two and the second two kindergartens concerning the production of cohesive speech events in formal classroom settings. The number of narratives containing one or more tokens of the particle ebe (both the MP and the emphasizing particle) is also given in table 1.

In the sample only three children use the narrative ebe successfully. However, there are several less successful attempts which reveal some of the difficulties involved.

The use of 'ebe' in children's narratives

When telling about personal experience in class it is normal for children at the age of the subjects to refer to background knowledge not shared by the audience. This observation is confirmed by the use of the MP ebe in our sample narratives. But at the same time some of the examples show how children become aware of the inappropriateness of using non-shared knowledge, and how they try to repair their utterances in order to comply with the rules of narrative discourse.

Examples (2) - (4) illustrate the use of the MP ebe in the sample narratives. In all three cases ebe occurs in a backgrounded clause

which introduces additional information for the understanding of the main point. Ebe is always unstressed and occurs syntactically after the finite verb.

(2) (Teacher introduces the speaker by telling the audience that he had his birthday yesterday.)

RA: min götti isch ebe geschter daa gsii,
my godfather is yesterday here been

denn han i de trax überchoo.
then have I the caterpillar gotten

(3) (At the entrance of the zoo)

KA: und dänn isch de bapi eläige go s bileet hole, und dänn
and then is the dad alone gone the ticket take and then

isch er halt i die räie choo wo s langsam ggange-n-isch,
is he MP in that line come where it slowly gone is

(backgr.) i de andere weer s schnäll gsy,
in the other were it quick been

und dä hät s mami miis bileet gnoo und ire siis,
and then has the mom my ticket taken and hers

(backgr.: lower pitch register, less accentuation)

es hät ebe pressiert uf s aabee, (laughs a little
she has hurried to the bathroom while speaking)

nacher sim-mer zu de wildsöi . . .
after are we to the wild boars

(4) CL: wo d Iren dööt i de feerie gsii isch,
when the I. there in the vacation been is

hät si ä mal äim äifacht äis uf s dach ggee.
(she once beat up one of those boys)

d Iren u-und ds ander mäitli isch ebe grooss
the I. a-and the other girl is big

gröösser weder di buebe.
bigger than those boys

(2) is the beginning of a narrative. The speaker bases his statement on presuppositions introduced by the teacher before his narrative: yesterday was his birthday, and on birthdays godfathers are supposed to give presents. With the MP ebe he signals that this statement is an obvious reason for or consequence of something. But ebe is misleading the listener because he cannot find any plausible reference at the moment, the explanation is only to follow. In this example the use of ebe reveals a somewhat egocentric behavior of the narrator, and his egocentrism is confirmed by the use of the definite article in "the caterpillar" which is new to the audience.

In (3) the speaker never mentions explicitly that her mother on purpose chose the faster line at the ticket office of the zoo; this information can only be inferred from the speaker's actual statements. But it seems that she nevertheless feels that an explanation for her mother's behavior is needed. By marking the reason for this behavior (needs to go to the bathroom) with ebe, the speaker communicates that after she knew this reason, it was obvious to her why her mother took the faster line. This is indeed a very sophisticated use of ebe, and

the intended point is not easy to understand right away. Evidently, in this example ebe has evaluative force, although it is not clear what exactly the speaker had in mind with her statement. Her laughing could signal that she simply thought it was funny to talk about her mother's intimacy in public.

In (4) the speaker feels that the audience could have doubts about the fact that girls might have been able to beat up boys. With the second clause she takes into account the expectations of the audience. This is a clear case of evaluation: the speaker realizes that the presuppositions associated with the knowledge of the audience about the strength of boys and girls contrast with what she just said. With ebe she refers to these presuppositions, and with her statement she tries to adapt them to the facts of her narrative.

Evaluation is always at work when the emphasizing, stressed ébe is used in narratives: the speaker tries to guide the audience along the main story line by signalling with ébe return from major digressions. By this means he establishes cohesion between those parts of the text which are important for the understanding of the main point.

Only three children use narrative ébe successfully in the present narratives. The following examples (5) and (6) are both from the narratives of the youngest child of the sample. (5) was produced at age 5;5, (6) at age 6;3.

Example (5) shows an unsuccessful attempt to structure a narrative containing digressive orientation clauses:[2]

(5) CL: und de sim-mer furt ggánge mit em zúug /
and then are we away gone with the train

(follows episode about trains; 4 clauses)

un und dänn -- de sim-mer ébe wo mer det aáchoo sind --
an-and then then are we when we there arrived are

sim-mer -- hä si isch de pápi . . .
are we ha(ve) a(re) is the dad

In this example stressed narrative ébe occurs after a major digression. It signals that the speaker tries to resume the main story line. Typically ébe is preceded by major hesitation phenomena revealing the struggle of the speaker at this point. With ébe the speaker signals that she found the thread, but she is not able to put everything together in the appropriate structure: the expected summarizing phrase does not follow. The speaker realizes that she is about to resume the abandoned episode at a point in the event sequence which was not reached before the digression. She tries to repair by introducing the missing piece of information with the means of a subordinate and prosodically backgrounded clause. But this does not solve the problem of continuation, and the only solution is a new start.

The attempt to restore the main story line by means of narrative ebe fails in the above example, but nine months later (see example 6) the same girl uses ébe three times successfully.

(6) is an example of a well-formed narrative: the text is well structured, and fore- and backgrounding are realized by means of

(6) Claudia: winter sports vacation; 64 clauses; time: 5' 20".

ORIENT.: 1 z La'ax sim-mer i de fe"erie gsii /
to L. are we in the vacation been

T-1 E-1 (play in wet snow with her sister Iren; 8 clauses)

E-2 (a cat comes at the door and begs for food; they let her in and
5 give her milk; she wants more; 7 clauses)

und denn -- /⌊emol amene taag het si imm"er gmiauzet nach flaisch /
and then once at a day has she always mew(z)ed for meat

und de hem-mer er(e) -- /
and then have we her

10 ⌊emoole amene -- taag -- / isch s mami emol — nöimed hii ggange
once at a day is the mom once somewhere gone

⌊uf Samaade ue an en gebuurtstaag mit em bape/ und de s isch
acc.
to S. up at a birthday(party) with the dad and then a(re) is

⌊nu no iich d Iren und de Urs gsi / und und de sim-mer gschloofe/
15 only me the I. and the U.(remained) and and then are we slept

⌜oöni s mami und de bapi /
without the mom and the dad

⌜di sind denn döt bblibe und hend döt gschloofe /
E-3a they are then there remained and have there slept

acc.
20 ⌊uf em kanape mit em treener /
on the sofa with the training(dress)

und denn sind s moo(rn) —⌊ganz früe am moorge wider choo /
and then are they tomorrow very early in the morning again come

→und denn — (noise in the audience)
25 and then

und amene -- t-taag — sim-mer a mal mit de Manuéela /
and at a d-day are we too once with the M.

T-2 E-3 di isch a mol i de poscht gsii — (yawns)
1'35" that(one) is also once at the post(office) been

⌊di het aber nume-n-ai wuche ferie ghaa /
30 that(one) has but only one week vacation had

--- und de -- und denn -- isch -- sim-mer⌜ebe -- mit dere elaige gsii /
and then and then is are we with that alone been

acc.
und s mami und de bapi sind bi s Rudolfs döte gsii -- /
35 and the mom and the dad are at the R. there been

E-3b →und de het s ganz guets flaisch gge / und de hem-mir gänz
and then has it very good meat given and then have we very

vil für b-busle bewaaret /⌊am maischte flaisch //
much for the pussy kept the most meat

40 (clarification exchange with teacher)

--und denn — und denn he — hem-mir⌜ebe das ggesse /
and then and then ha(ve) have we that eaten

und flaisch han iich und d Iren und de Urs am maischte uufbewaaret//
and meat have I and the I. and the U. the most kept

acc.
45 und de het d Iren ebe no gschloofe
and then has the I. still slept

⌜wo-n-ich uuf gsi bi am andere moorge /
when I up been am at the next morning

und de han iich im ales flaisch ggeexxxa de busle // (laughs and
50 and then have I him all meat given to the pussy coughs)

T-3 E-4 (skiing; 10 clauses)

E-5 (sled riding; 10 clauses)(clarification exchange with teacher)

--und denn — isch ebe b-busle jede taag choo //
and then is the pussy every day come

T-2 E-6 55 und äimol he s erschti maal het s de bapi . . . .
and once ha(s) the first time has it the dad (cont.)

(tells how her father found the cat; 5 clauses).

prosody, such as change of pitch register, different stress patterns, and rhythmic variation.

After an introductory episode (E-1) the speaker focuses on the cat which becomes the topic (T-2) of the following episodes (E-3, E-6), and sub-episodes (E-3a, E-3b). Throughout the narrative, important episodes are intorduced by tokens of the formulaic clause "once upon a day."

Shortly after the first start (line 6), she realizes that there is much more background needed in order to understand the point she has in mind. So, in 10, she starts again, signalling background by low pitch and fewer stresses. But in 14 she realizes again that it is too early to return to the main story line. The parent's visit at friends' and the children's staying at home alone was so funny that it is worth being told for its own sake. Note the change in pitch register in line 16 signalling foreground.

Then, in 24 she realizes that it is not true that the children were alone at home, and, in a new episode starting at 26, she introduces the babysitter.

Finally in 30 she has all the background together, and in 32, after narrative ebe, which signals the return to the main story line, she summarizes what she has told about their being alone at home and the babysitter:

1.32: und denn sim-mer ebe -- mit dere elaige gsii
and then are we with that one alone been

Narrative ebe (followed by a short pause) emphasizes the whole summarizing phrase which itself establishes anaphoric cohesion. Typically, the use of ebe cooccurs with prosodic means of foregrounding, such as higher pitch and stress--this is confirmed in this narrative by the use of ebe in 11.41 and 53--and what is foregrounded is old information referred to by anaphoric coreference ("that one") and substitution ("alone" stands for a whole paragraph) (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The evaluative function of this procedure consisting of foregrounding old information is evident: it tells the listener how to incorporate background information into the main story line, and, by this means, it advances the story towards the main point.

But there is still something missing. The speaker forgot the meat dish, and the most important fact--signalled with strong stress in 37/38--that all three children, in a common effort, saved meat for the cat.

And then, in 41, stressed ebe with high pitch restores foreground and anticipates the excitement of the main point to come. But, again, she does not succeed in heading straight to the point. In 43 she overemphasizes the common effort of saving meat for the cat, which, of course, is crucial to the point, but does not advance the narrative.

In 45 follows another thing she forgot to mention, i.e. that her sister was still sleeping, when she (the speaker) got up the next morning. The unstressed MP ebe in 45--note that there is no hesitation

involved, and that ebe occurs in a backgrounded clause marked by acceleration--signals that the message is related to the point, but it is up to the hearer (no evaluation) to find out what the relation is, although the speaker with the MP ebe obviously refers to shared knowledge.

As a matter of fact, she could have used narrative ébe at this point, in order to tie back 45 to 14 where the main episode was left, but this goes beyond her narrative capability.

So, despite her efforts to structure the narrative for the preparation of the main point, as it finally is reached in 49, she is the only one who laughs!

After having related other experiences (T-3: E-4, E-5), in 53 she returns to the 'cat' topic. This return, again, is marked by narrative ebe followed by the old topic (the pussy) which is foregrounded prosodically.

This narrative exemplifies the evaluative function of the particle ébe in narrative discourse. It shows well developed discourse capabilities--but also the limits--of a six-year-old child. Only about half of the children of the sample reveal similar capabilities in their narratives of personal experience. It is the task of future research to contrast the differences, and by doing so, to provide insights into individual differences in the capability of the production of narrative discourse among children about to enter school.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to demonstrate how five- to seven-year olds begin to cooperate with their audience when relating personal experience in a formal classroom setting. Examples of two uses of the Swiss-German particle ebe illustrated how these children evaluate their narratives in order to guide the audience along the main story line.

In most cases the use of the MP ebe to highlight supposedly shared contextual knowledge, does not succeed in narrative texts where all context has to be built up before it can be referred to. Most children become aware of the oddity of the MP ebe in their narrative utterances, and try to repair their statements. It seems that through these 'errors' the child becomes aware of the specific contextual requirements and constraints of the narrative register.

The second use, i.e. the emphasizing, stressed narrative ébe, can only occur in well-formed narratives, where it cooccurs systematically with other evaluative devices, such as prosody, subordination and organization of content. Narrative ébe is a major foregrounding device which serves to establish cohesion between the text parts of the main story line.

At the average age of 6;9, about half of our subjects were capable of producing well-formed narratives, but only three children used narrative ébe successfully. The observed difficulties of its adequate use show that the use of narrative ébe is not fully mastered at this age.

Notes

1. As shown in Polanyi (1978:365), in English the same function can be accomplished by the particle so.

2. Legend of prosody markers:

/	minor tone group	⌜	high pitch register
//	major tone group	⌞	low pitch register
' or ˈ	stress	acc.	increased rate
" or ˈˈ	strong stress	--	short pause
		xxx	laughs while speaking

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